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Appropriations

Gaming Revenue Continues Strong Start for FY 2026

While experts predicted that the state would see less revenue from casinos in Fiscal Year 2026, reality is that collections from the casino gaming tax have grown through the first four months of the fiscal year.

In October, casinos paid \$26.5 million in casino gaming tax to the state. This is an increase of \$2 million over September's collections and an \$850,000 increase over what the state collected in October 2024. For the first four months of the fiscal year, casino gaming tax payments have totaled \$99.7 million. This is \$600,000 more in tax collections than what was taken in during the same period in Fiscal Year 2025.

While a difference of less than one percent may not seem like a lot, it is a positive change for casino gaming tax payments. Gaming tax revenue has declined each year since Fiscal Year 2022. Last spring, the Revenue Estimating Conference projected that gaming tax revenue would again decline by 4 percent in FY 2026. They have already had to revise that figure up in October and may adjust it again at their December meeting.

While a smaller amount of revenue, sports wagering tax has never declined since betting on sporting events was legalized in 2019. Fiscal Year 2026 looks to be continuing this pattern. The state took in \$1.949 million in sports wagering tax in October. This was \$700,000 more than what the state collected in October 2024. For the start of Fiscal Year 2026, sports wagering tax revenue are up 21 percent over the same period last year. While the percentage increase is significant, the dollar difference is just \$1.1 million.

(Contact: Brad Trow 1-3471)

Commerce

Medicare Open Enrollment Continues till December 7

The following was provided by the Iowa Insurance Division:

Every fall, Medicare beneficiaries can review and change their Prescription Drug Plan or Medicare Advantage Plan during the Open Enrollment Period (OEP) from October 15 to December 7. With this year's OEP underway, thousands of Iowans are turning to Medicare and SHIP-SMP for help navigating options with major plan changes expected in 2026.

Medicare Prescription Drug Plan and Medicare Advantage Plan costs, benefits, covered prescriptions and provider networks can change each year. Following the 2025 cap on prescription drug copayments and new price negotiations on 10 high-cost sole-source drugs starting in 2026, many plans are adjusting their benefits and coverage options.

Some of the biggest changes that Medicare beneficiaries in Iowa should look out for this OEP:

- **Medicare Advantage Plan Cancellations:** UnitedHealthcare and Wellmark have significantly reduced the number of plans offered. UnitedHealthcare is canceling 8 of their 10 AARP Medicare Advantage plans in Iowa, and Wellmark is canceling 3 of 4 Medicare Advantage plans in Iowa with drug coverage. The UHC changes alone are estimated to impact 36,494 enrollees in canceled plans who will be left without healthcare coverage unless they enroll in a new plan beginning January 1st.
- **Medicare Advantage Service Area Reductions:** Additionally, 22 other Medicare Advantage plans have reduced their service area coverage. If a member's current plan is no longer available in their county, they would be without coverage starting January 1st if they do not enroll in an alternative option.
- **Provider Network Changes:** Providers can change their contracts with Medicare Advantage plans to be in-network, out-of-network or to not accept plan coverage entirely. Several large providers are limiting the Medicare Advantage plans they accept, making it increasingly important to confirm provider networks for the upcoming year.
- **Negotiated Drug Prices:** Lower costs have been negotiated for Eloquis, Jardiance, Xarelto, Januvia, Farxiga, Entresto, Enbrel, Imbruvica, Stelara, and Novolog/Fiasp. Unlike the \$35 cap on insulins, the cost for these drugs will vary by plan – but beneficiaries should see significantly lower prices compared to last year.

Kristin Griffith, Director of the Iowa Insurance Division's Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP) and Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP), wants to remind beneficiaries about Guaranteed Issue Rights. "Anyone with a plan that has been canceled or is no longer offered in their county has a right to either switch to another Medicare Advantage plan or return to Original Medicare and purchase a Medicare Supplement without going through health underwriting, being denied or charged a higher premium. This is called a 'guaranteed issue' opportunity and is only available until February 28, 2026." However, beneficiaries should still strive to make changes before the end of this year to ensure continuity of coverage starting January 1st.

It is time individuals on Medicare to read all mail from their plan or provider and stay informed of possible changes. Medicare beneficiaries receive an Annual Notice of Change (ANOC) each September from their Prescription Drug Plan or Medicare Advantage Plan. This is a summary of any changes in the plan that will take effect on January 1 of the next year (i.e. premium cost, coverage, copays, and service area). If a Medicare beneficiary receives notice in their ANOC that their plan has been canceled or is no longer offered in their zip code, that letter is the proof required to secure the guaranteed issue right to enroll in a Medicare Supplement.

If a Medicare beneficiary is happy with current coverage after reviewing plan changes and options for the year ahead, no action is necessary during Open Enrollment. They will automatically be re-enrolled for the following year if their Part D or Medicare Advantage plan has not been canceled. However, it is smart to always compare the current plan to other options available for the year ahead.

"Navigating the Open Enrollment Period can seem daunting, but you don't have to do it alone," said Griffith. "We have well-trained and certified SHIIP-SMP counselors across the state equipped to help you with this process. The SHIIP-SMP program has a track record of saving Iowans money and helping with Medicare questions and problems."

Local resources are available to help compare plan options- but appointments are filling up quickly. The Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP) and Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) provide free, confidential, and unbiased one-on-one Medicare counseling through the Iowa Insurance Division with the support of federal funding. SHIIP-SMP can be reached by calling 1-800-351-4664. In 2024, the program served more than 52,000 Medicare beneficiaries and saved clients in Iowa tens of millions of dollars.

2026 plan details can be found at: [Medicare.gov/plan-compare](https://www.medicare.gov/plan-compare). Through the Medicare.gov Plan Finder, Medicare beneficiaries can see and compare plan options available in 2026. Once all Iowa SHIIP/ SMP counselor appointments are full, you can still get assistance from Medicare service representatives. Medicare service representatives are available 24/7 to provide support at 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227).

(Contact: Natalie Ginty 5-2063)

Department Seeks Committee Members for Social Studies Essential Elements Standards

The Iowa Department of Education is currently seeking representatives to serve on the official revision committee for the state's Social Studies Essential Elements, which provide standards for students with significant cognitive disabilities who are participating in alternate assessments.

Serving in an advisory capacity to the Department, committee members are tasked with reviewing the current Essential Elements and providing recommendations for proposed updates. The committee will meet in a combination of in-person and virtual meetings over three months, starting in January 2026. All members must commit to attending the following meetings:

- January 22, 2026, Des Moines
- February 3, 2026, Virtual
- February 25, 2026, Virtual
- March 17, 2026, Des Moines
- March 31, 2026, Des Moines (if needed)

Iowa K-12 social studies educators, K-12 special education teachers, district-level staff, parents, community members and representatives from higher education institutions are encouraged to apply to serve on the committee.

The state's Essential Elements across all subjects are reviewed regularly to ensure the content is current and aligns with best practices. Following the initial review, the Department will consider the proposed changes and seek public input to help refine revisions. A second review team will be convened to review all public comments and provide further recommendations. A final proposal for the Essential Elements will be presented to the State Board of Education for consideration. If adopted, school districts will be required to implement the revised Social Studies Essential Elements.

[Applications for the Social Studies Essential Elements revision committee](#) will be accepted through Nov. 24. Questions regarding [Iowa's Essential Elements can be found on the Department's website](#). Direct questions on Iowa's Social Studies Essential Elements can be directed to Jennifer Denne, alternate assessment consultant, at jennifer.denne@iowa.gov.

(Info from Iowa Department of Education)

New Department Webpage Offers Resources for Teaching Jewish History

To meet the requirements of Governor Kim Reynolds's [Executive Order 13](#), an extensive list of resources is now available for Iowa schools to support Iowa's content standards on Jewish history and related topics.

[Iowa schools can now access online resources](#), instructional best practices, links to professional development opportunities and other materials to support their classroom activities on Jewish history, the Holocaust and Israel. Iowa K-12 social studies teachers and administrators are encouraged to visit the webpage to meet the requirements of Executive Order 13, signed earlier this year.

Established through Executive Order 13, the Iowa Department of Education was charged with making these resources available to all schools. Executive Order 13 supports Israel and the Jewish community and condemns any form of threat, harassment, intimidation, hate speech or other actions that endanger the Jewish community or violate state or federal law.

Questions regarding the new webpage and online resources can be directed to Stefanie Rosenberg Wager, administrative consultant, at stefanie.wager@iowa.gov.
(Info from Iowa Department of Education)

(Contact: Kristin Rozeboom 1-3015)

Health and Human Services

Iowa Rural Health Transformation Plan Released

Recently, Governor Reynolds submitted Iowa’s application for federal funding from the One Big Beautiful Bill (OB BB) for the Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP). Iowa’s application totals \$1 billion over 5 years. The application can be found here:

https://hhs.iowa.gov/media/17491/download?inline=&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery.

Iowa’s plan is titled Healthy Hometowns and has 5 initiatives outlined below: Hometown Connections, Combat Cancer: Prevent and Treat, Communities of Care, Health Information Exchange, and EMS Community Care Mobile.

Healthy Hometowns

- Hometown Connections**
 - Centers of Excellence
 - Best and Brightest
 - School-Based
 - Health Hubs
- Combat Cancer: Prevent and Treat**
 - Increased Screening Access
 - U of Iowa Cancer Analyses
 - Cancer Hubs
 - Radon Testing and Mitigation
- Communities of Care**
 - Co-Location Projects
 - Coordinated Service Provision
 - Chronic Disease Prevention
 - Teledentistry Equipment
- Health Information Exchange**
 - Vendor Contract
 - Provider Expansion
 - RHT Initiative Connections
- EMS Community Care Mobile**
 - ImageTrend QI Dashboards
 - OB and Neonatal Transport
 - Mobile Integrated Health Assessment

Iowa’s RHTP application builds on the work of the legislature this session in House File 972 that created a funding model to establish regional collaboration between health care providers in rural areas, known as a hub-and-spoke model. Additionally, the legislature has invested funds since 2023 into these Centers of Excellence grants to create hubs of health care access for specialties like maternal health. This RHTP application puts all that work on super drive investing \$100 million into new or expanded Centers of Excellence throughout Iowa.

The application also makes significant investments in cancer prevention and treatment in the state. This session the legislature began funding radon test kits, and this application builds on that by funding 30,000 radon tests annually and subsidizing mitigation for 500 rural homes per year to combat lung cancer rates in rural Iowa.

Additionally, among many rural health care investments in workforce and technology, this application provides almost \$45 million to expand access to EMS in rural areas. The EMS Community Care Mobile will provide mobile integrated health care units serving patients in their homes or at other community sites to avoid Emergency Department use and help with chronic conditions. This application also focuses on high-risk OB and neonatal transport utilizing telehealth to treat rural patients that are over 30 minutes from a birthing hospital.

Currently the federal government is reviewing all 50 state applications and will receive awards by December 31, 2025. Iowa stands in a good position to receive the entire application funding based on the significant rural aspect of our state. 47.5% of Iowa's population resides in rural areas, compared to only 17% of the total U.S. population.

This application is the largest strategic investment to improve rural health care access and the health of rural Iowans ever seen before. Once again, this shows the true components of the OBBB and combats all the Democrat and media fearmongering against the legislation that helps working Iowans and taxpayers in countless ways.

(Contact: Natalie Ginty 5-2063)

Labor

Veterans in Iowa's Workforce

In honor of Veterans Day, here are some stats and resources Iowa provides to support Veterans' career paths.

Iowa Workforce Development provides resources through Home Base Iowa to help veterans. Home Base Iowa connects Iowa businesses with qualified veterans and their spouses looking for career opportunities. The program also provides resources to help connect veterans and their families with education and in transitioning to a new community. Home Base Iowa is now directly integrated into IowaWORKS, the state's largest jobs bank and home of valuable tools for finding careers across Iowa. Veterans can find one-on-one career assistance, while Iowa employers will gain access to powerful tools and a database of skilled veteran resumes. Click [here](#) to go to the IowaWorks for Veterans page. Iowa has an estimated 60,000 veterans who are in Iowa's workforce between the ages of 18 and 64. The unemployment rate for Iowa Veterans is 2.8%, while the rate for non-Veterans is 3.2%. (Source: American Community Survey (ACS))

(Info from Iowa Workforce Development)

(Contact: Kristin Rozeboom 1-3015)

Public Safety

Iowa Steps Up the Fight Against Human Trafficking

Over the last few years, Iowa has taken major steps to strengthen its laws against human trafficking — the crime of exploiting people through force, fraud, or coercion for sex or labor. House Republicans have worked to increase penalties for traffickers, expanded protections for victims, and introduced new measures to help survivors rebuild their lives.

Tougher Penalties for Traffickers

In 2023, Governor Kim Reynolds signed House File 630, a bill that dramatically raised the punishment for anyone convicted of human trafficking, especially when children are involved. Under this law, anyone found guilty of trafficking a child under 18 can face a life sentence. Other trafficking crimes now carry longer prison terms and fewer opportunities for reduced sentences or early release.

House Republicans have sent a clear message: those who exploit Iowa's children will face the harshest consequences under the law.

Stronger Protections for Victims

In 2024, lawmakers built on that foundation by passing House File 2460. This measure focused on strengthening protections for survivors and improving how they are treated in the justice system. The law ensures that every victim has access to an advocate during court proceedings and that individuals with disabilities can receive a court-appointed attorney when needed. It also requires that serious trafficking offenders serve at least half of their sentence before becoming eligible for parole.

These changes reflect a growing recognition that survivors should not have to face the system alone and that their voices deserve to be heard and supported throughout the process.

Closing Loopholes in 2025

The most recent update came in 2025 with House File 649, which refined Iowa's legal definition of human trafficking to close loopholes and strengthen prosecutions. The new law makes it a crime to buy or attempt to buy sex or labor from someone involved in trafficking, even if the buyer claims not to know the person was a victim. It also removed an old requirement that trafficking involve an "ongoing relationship" between the trafficker and the victim, which had made it difficult to prosecute certain cases. Finally, the law broadened the definition of "victim" to include people who are being targeted or groomed for trafficking, offering protection before the abuse begins.

Together, these changes make it easier for law enforcement to step in early and for prosecutors to hold traffickers accountable.

What It Means for Iowans

With these updates, Iowa has made clear that human trafficking will not be tolerated. The combination of tougher penalties, clearer definitions, and stronger victim support creates a more effective framework for prevention and justice.

But laws alone are not enough. Awareness and education remain key to stopping trafficking before it happens. Iowans who learn how to recognize the signs and report concerns can make a real difference.

If you suspect human trafficking, contact the Iowa Helpline at 1-800-770-1650 or text "IOWAHELP" to 20121.

(Contact: Amanda Wille 1-5230)

State Government

State Government Efficiency Review Committee Meets Next Week

Over the last few years, the Iowa Legislature has reviewed and reorganized the state government to better and more efficiently serve Iowans. Beginning with the historic [2023 legislation](#) that restructured and realigned the organization of the state government and its agencies. From that legislation, the Board and Commissions Review Committee was created and tasked with evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of each board, council, commission, or committee established by code.

Prior to the 2023 review conducted by the committee, the state had never in the history of Iowa reviewed and evaluated its 256 boards and commissions. The Commission divided the entities into subcommittees to evaluate related categories. The subcommittees are Licensing (47 entities), State Government (51 entities), Agriculture and Natural Resources (35 entities), Workforce, Labor, Education (36 entities), Economy and Finance (36 entities), and Human Services (51 entities). The committee sent out questionnaires to all 256 entities that are being evaluated. Questions included whether the entity is statutorily required, funding sources, licensing authority, rulemaking authority, membership makeup, volume and frequency of meetings, and many other questions to get a clear overview of how each of these entities operate.

Following the committee's review, the legislature passed [legislation](#) to reduce the number of these boards and commissions that no longer met, had achieved their legislative goals, or were merged with similar boards. The new law also included provisions for regular review of all committees to continue to evaluate the usefulness, performance, and efficacy of each board. The State Government Efficiency Review Committee will review 25% of all boards every year on a recurring four-year cycle that begins in 2025.

The State Government Efficiency Review Committee will meet on Monday, November 17 at 11:00 AM in Room 103 of the Capitol. The meeting is open to members of the public and can also be viewed online [here](#).

(Contact: Jason Covey 1-3626)

Transportation

Governor Extends Harvest Proclamation

Governor Kim Reynolds has extended her annual proclamation relating to the weight limits and transportation of grain, fertilizer, and manure.

The extended proclamation allows vehicles transporting soybeans, corn, hay, straw, silage, and stover to be overweight (not exceeding 90,000 pounds gross weight) without a permit, for the duration of this proclamation.

This proclamation applies to loads transported on all highways within Iowa (excluding the interstate system) and those which do not exceed a maximum of 90,000 pounds gross weight, do not exceed the maximum axle weight limit determined under the non-primary highway maximum gross weight table in Iowa Code § 321.463 (6) (b), by more than 12.5 percent, do not exceed the legal maximum axle weight limit of 20,000 pounds and comply with posted limits on roads and bridges.

The harvest proclamation now runs through November 17, 2025.

(Contact: Brad Trow 1-3471)

Veterans Affairs

Shedding Light on Migraine and Post-Traumatic Headache

The following was provided by the [University of Iowa](#):

Post-traumatic headache (PTH) shares many of the same symptoms as migraines. Characterized by severe pain and sensory hypersensitivity, they're disruptive and often difficult to treat.

However, unlike migraines, PTH is typically triggered by traumatic brain injury (TBI). It's especially prevalent among military Veterans—studies suggest that as many as 50% of Veterans continue to experience chronic PTH for more than six months after even mild TBIs.

Despite the similarities, there are currently no FDA-approved treatments specifically for PTH. This gap in care is what drives University of Iowa Health Care researcher [Levi Sowers](#) (12PhD), assistant professor in the Stead Family Department of Pediatrics and the Division of Child Neurology. Sowers' PhD studies at Iowa—working with pediatric neurologist [Alex Bassuk](#), MD, PhD, now chair of the Stead Family Department of Pediatrics—laid the foundation for a career focused on understanding and treating complex neurological conditions.

We communicate science in a way that Veterans can connect with,” Sowers says. “It’s been a great way to bridge the gap between research and real-world impact.””

He expanded his expertise in the lab of [Andrew Russo](#), PhD, a professor in the Department of Physiology and Biophysics. Russo is an internationally recognized migraine expert whose research contributed to the development of FDA-approved drugs targeting calcitonin gene-related peptide (CGRP), a molecule linked to migraine pain. Together, Russo and Sowers patented a drug targeting another peptide implicated in headache disorders, pituitary adenylate cyclase-activating polypeptide (PACAP), which recently completed Phase II clinical trials. This work helped inform Sowers' current research.

Sowers serves as an investigator with the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Visual Loss, based in Iowa City. His VA-affiliated lab focuses on the brain mechanisms behind sensory symptoms like photophobia, or light sensitivity, which is often the most distressing symptom of both migraine and PTH, second only to pain. “When I started working on traumatic brain injury-induced headaches and migraines, which are huge problems among Veterans, it was meaningful to know that my work might help in some way,” Sowers says. “I think we have a moral obligation to take care of our Veterans.”

Sowers' lab uses advanced tools like optogenetics, which employs genetic engineering and fiber-optic light to activate or silence specific brain regions in animal models. This technique allows researchers to pinpoint how different parts of the brain contribute to symptoms like light sensitivity. More recently, his team has adopted DREADDs (designer receptors exclusively activated by designer drugs), which offer similar control using targeted chemical compounds. These tools help identify promising brain targets, paving the way for future non-pharmacological therapies.

Sowers' commitment to Veterans also extends beyond the lab. In 2018, he launched Vets First, a podcast created as part of a broader VA outreach initiative. The show features interviews with scientists, clinicians, and Veterans, covering a wide range of topics. With over 33 episodes and 15,000 downloads, it makes veteran-focused research accessible to a broader audience.

“We communicate science in a way that Veterans can connect with,” Sowers says. “It’s been a great way to bridge the gap between research and real-world impact.”

Sowers has also joined forces with other UI researchers to tackle broader questions about brain health through interdisciplinary collaborations. He is currently part of two major initiatives funded by the Iowa Neuroscience Institute and the Roy J. Carver Charitable Trust.

One project, the Pediatric Developing Brain Collaborative, brings together researchers from across pediatrics and neuroscience to explore how neuroinflammation may contribute to a range of childhood disorders. The team hopes to learn more about how brain inflammation may underlie behavioral and neurological symptoms across different conditions such as TBI, hemophilia, and chronic kidney disease.

The second initiative, focused on migraine resilience, brings together a team of neuroscientists and clinicians to take a multi-omics approach to headache research. The team is using innovative tools like spatial transcriptomics, electomics, and small-animal functional MRIs to map how the brain responds to different headache-inducing compounds.

“The goal is to build a more complete picture,” Sowers says. “Understanding not just the circuits but also the cellular and molecular changes that happen in the brain during migraine or after injury—that’s how we’ll get closer to real solutions.”

(Contact: Natalie Ginty 5-2063)